



# The South India CHURCHMAN

The Magazine of the Church of South India

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GTULIBRARY "... everyone was filled with the Holy Spirit" Acts 2:4





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**Opinions expressed by contributors do not commit the C.S.I.**

## THE SOUTH INDIA

## CHURCHMAN

*The Magazine of the Church of South India*

**MAY 1996**

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## 25 Years Ago!

Another event which needs to be widely known in the Church is that, for the first time in the history of Christianity in India, a Theological Conference was held (in Madurai in April) in which all the thinking, the papers and the discussions were in the local language, Tamil. It was a joint conference of the C.S.I. and the Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church. 150 Presbyters of both Churches and the Bishops of our Tamil dioceses and Bishop Manickam of the T.E.L.C. were present. It should prove very stimulating and would indicate how far we have really absorbed into our thinking theological ideas taught to us by Western theologians and how far we are able to express them in our own language, against the background of a specifically Indian but fully Christian religious experience.

—R. D. PAUL

*Churchman 1957*

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# Vision for Equipping the Local Congregation in Mission-VELCOM



'VELCOM' as a programme, has been introduced to bring out not only guided development through its four tenets, Agape, Agenda, Analysis and Action but also changes in attitude, outlook, goals and aspirations of the people. Efforts are being made by the VELCOM contact persons, one in each diocese, and the small action groups they have formed, to orientate congregations in rural and urban areas towards emerging new values of sharing, caring, serving and praying communities.

## People's Participation

The practice hitherto has been that different programmes are imposed from the Synod or the headquarters; as a result most of the contents of a programme become, by and large, misfit to local conditions and requirements. This has been the complaint of many congregations. VELCOM, as it focuses its attention on people and their active participation, has offered a common platform for people to come together and plan together, truly helping growing and sharing together.

## Justice Issues

As a result of people's participation at the decision making places, and their free and frank discussions, in some places justice issues have been the important points on their agenda.

Growth and development in different sectors of life and the communal harmony are highly lop-sided, imbalanced and un-harmonious. Poverty and illiteracy are factors on account of which the villagers, mostly, either do not understand or could not afford to adopt innovations. The local congregations have been inspired and made aware of the situations, are trying to usher in just society basing on the kingdom values taught by Jesus Christ.

## Ecological Issues

The Concept that we are 'friends of earth', and the 'eco-children' has been successfully passed on to many local congregations. Projects like Green Revolution, Greening the Earth, Grow more Trees which are undertaken by some dioceses are yielding fruits. In some areas, the neighbouring dioceses are encouraged to take up such projects involving the local congregations.

## New Churches Built

In almost all the dioceses many new churches are built by the local congregations. In some cases, in order to encourage the local congregations 'a seed-money' was paid from the priority grants but the amount was quite negligible when compared with the huge funds the local congregations had collected. People were motivated to donate, collect and even offered their services — 'sramadaan'.

Traditional axis of power, the locus of authority and the pattern of leadership are shifting their position from their age old locus and arena to a new democratic one and as such a new chapter has been opened up that provides for sharing of resources and power. Church is learning new lessons and new obedience and if VELCOM is properly understood and implemented and allowed to penetrate deeply, I am sure, we will be blessed with the desired results in strengthening our congregations which perhaps will force us to impose moratorium on foreign funds and the local congregations will emerge self-sufficient, self-reliant to play the role of salt and light to preserve communities and dispel the darkness. It is hoped that the VELCOM will bridge the gaps and bring all people together for a peaceful co-existence.

—DASS BABU



# A Little Girl's Big Dream

This is about a young village doctor who lives in a remote rural area in South India. She is available for 24 hours to the poor people around. 'Shouldn't she restrict her visiting hours so that she could get enough sleep? or couldn't she have a junior doctor to attend the night calls?' No, she wouldn't be able to fulfil her childhood dream. Her dream was to serve the poor; providing quality health care for them at an affordable cost.

As a young girl she used to tell her family and friends, 'When I grow up, I will treat poor patients for 2 paise! Why not free? Her father, a bishop, had taught her 'Never give anything free, it becomes cheap; Don't offer a valuable service for no cost, it becomes charity; charge the patients what they can afford and thus you treat them with dignity. They may be poor patients but their self respect must be protected'. Once in the Bishop's company, some years ago, I received a dose of his chastisement, for giving alms to a beggar. His social vision was beyond my comprehension in those days. A bishop who inspired not only his daughter but many other young people of his time. A bishop who believed that social transformation towards greater equality and justice was the need of the hour. Person's charity may hinder or counter the more urgent social process.

It was interesting to watch the style of medical service in this doctor's place. She has a modest house attached to the clinic. Her husband is the receptionist, accountant, cashier and lay administrator in the hospital. He tries to supplement the family income by cultivating curry leaves in the backyard! 'We need only so much; which we are able to make through our clinic and garden. God has blessed our work; He uses us in His ministry of healing. We have only one child. Why should one accumulate, much wealth? We would rather accumulate

the love of the simple folk in the village where our grandfather had served. We are happy, and that is enough'. If Oliver Goldsmith were alive today he would write a poem on this 'village doctor' after the style of his village schoolmaster in 'The Deserted Village'. 'And still they gazed and still the wonder grew that one small head could carry all he knew. 'Could... that one small heart' hold so much love for so many!

Recently my wife and I visited the clinic and the family, one late evening. The doctor was still in her consulting room. About half a dozen patients were around her. She received us, went back to the patients and returned after they were 'seen'. One could see that physically she was exhausted, but was very cheerful and she cheered us. We chatted for a while. I had always noticed her transparency in conversation and my respect for her was all the more greater because of this.

As we wanted to give her a hint that we were in a hurry and thinking that she would not let us go without taking something, I asked her 'Do you have a cup of tea or something'? With utter frankness she said, 'annan, I am sorry we don't have anything in the kitchen that we can offer you'. I couldn't but admire her honesty, and so said 'Why don't you just give some plain water'. She responded with her innocent smile; Yes, that was all she had in the house to offer us at that moment. I was struck by her utter frankness. She brought three glasses of water. We quenched our thirst. That gave us freedom to get up and leave. As we left the taste of the honesty, the simplicity and the sincerity she put in that glass of water lingered in our mouths for many hours. That was the best cup of tea I have ever tasted, in recent times!

—SAM AMIRTHAM  
Bishop



# Angelology, a Biblical Perspective

REV. P.J. PANCHARATHNAM, *Nandyal*

Angels are heavenly beings. They live in the presence of God carrying out the orders of the great creator. They are spirits with no body. They play an important role in the life of every Christian.

In Ps. 8:5 we read how man was made a little lower than angels the heavenly beings. Yet God has arranged these angels as ministering spirits to all those who believe in him. The thought that angels protect and guard a God-fearing person, is itself a matter of courage to a Christian. In the coming days when the foundations of Christianity are going to be shaken and when Christians are going to face mighty trials and tribulations, an understanding of the angelology may give him a firm foot to stand boldly. Angels at the Command of God will become our refuge and strength when we become the children of the great God who is in heaven.

On the 29th of September according to the Church Almanac, the Church of South India Celebrates the great day of St. Michael and all Holy Angels every year. The faith that Christians have in the existence of angels and their offices according to the teachings of the Holy Scriptures is a great source of comfort and courage in their lives especially in times of danger, sorrow, need troubles and temptation. The very thought and the traditional belief in which the Christians are brought up, that every child of God is provided with a guardian angel right from the time of conception in their mother's womb gives a lot of courage in this life of strife and sorrow. Some like the Sadducees doubt the existence of angels and spirits. Others have paid them too much of honour. The former is far more dangerous error than the latter.

Let us know who these angels are. The word angel means 'messenger' Angels are God's messengers. But this was not their first name, for at their creation there were none, so far as we know, to whom they could act as messengers. Their first name was 'Sons of God' and under this title they are described as wandering spectators (Job 38:7) of the creation of the world. In the epistle to the Hebrews angels are spoken of as 'ministering spirits' (literally spirits of worship) sent forth to minister for them who shall be 'heirs of salvation'. So the work of the

angels consists in the worship of God and in the service of men. The angels are moral agents, that is to say, they possess freewill and are able to choose between good and evil. These angels are the highest beings in the scale of creation and their existence and work in the universe is abundantly testified by the Holy Scripture and the teaching of the Church. They are supernatural spiritual beings created certainly before men, if not before matter. These angles are spirits and therefore not encumbered with natural forms of flesh, nor subject to laws of nature. They are more ethereal, capable of passing through space with the rapidity of the lightning flash, or of the transit of light. They have passed through a state of probation as they are they elect angels. Angles are immortal, Holy, innumerable in multitude (Heb 12:22), wise, powerful, respectful of authority (Jude 9:5), sexless (Matt 22:30) invisible, obedient, (Ps 103:20), possessing emotions (Lk 15:10) organised in ranks or orders according to the intimations in the Holy Scriptures. These ranks or orders are generally supported to be nine in number and are thus named. 1. The Seraphim (Is 6:2, 6) 2. Cherubim (Gen. 3:24, Ps 18:10), 3. Thrones 4. Dominions 5. Principalities, 6. Powers, 7. Virtues (Eph 1:21, Col 1:16) 8. Archangels (1st Thes 14:16 Jude 9), 9. Angels (Heb 1:13, 1 Peter 3:22). Seraphim are angels of highest rank in the traditional angelology of the Church with six wings who stand on either side of the throne of Jehova according to the prophet Isaiah. The Cherubim are angels with four wings. Archangels are Chief angels. All these who are different in ranks or orders are distinct in their character and functions.

## What are their offices towards God?

They do God's service in heaven. They are the ministering spirits perpetually engaged in the ritual of heaven of behalf of faithful toward God and on behalf of God to the faithful taking part in the worship of the Church in earth, paradise and heaven. So prophet Isaiah beheld the Seraphim as they cried to one to another 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty, the whole earth is full of his glory' Ezekiel saw the cherubim as they stood around the throne after returning from fulfilling the divine behests in the immediate presence of God.



St. John beheld and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousand upon thousands and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they sang: Rev. 5:11-12.

'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise' St. John heard as it were the voice of a great multitude singing Allalulia Rev. 19. He saw the four living creatures and the four and twenty elders fall down before the lamb having every one of them harp and golden vials full of odours which are the prayers of Saints Rev. 5 Chap. So also are the other prayers of angels to God namely the Tedeum 'To thee all angels cry aloud' and the Benedict 'O all Ye all the angels of the Lord' and the Holy communion Office 'Therefore with angels and archangel and with all the Company of heaven we laud and magnify the glorious name ever more singing Holy, Holy, Holy. . . . ' Thus the angels do always worship and praise God.

#### Their offices towards man

Angels are ministers of God's providence in nature and grace. When God's creation was perfected 'the Sons of God shouted for Joy'. When He recreated the World in Christ, the angels sang their 'Gloria in Excelsis' Besides this they have general superintendence over the World as instruments of God's providence (Rev. 7:1, 14:18, 16:1-10 Dan. 10:13-20), over the church Rev. 2:1-3, 12-18, Rev. 3:1-7, and as executors of His wrath Gen. 19:1. The angels succour and defend us on earth. They take charge of the human souls from the first moment of their existence St. Matt. 18:10. They guard the faithful through life in body and soul Ps. 91:11, Acts 12:15, Ps. 34:7, St. Matt. 4:6. They are near to strengthen and comfort the Christian in times of temptation and affliction St. Matt. 4:11, St. Luke 22:43. At the last hour they bear his soul to paradise St. Luke 16:22. At the day of Judgement, they bring the body also to its final state, St. Matt. 13:49-50.

#### Ministry towards believers

Angels are always very near to those who fear God and trust in Him. They deliver His people from danger Dan. 6:22, Act. 12:7-11. They protect Ps. 34:7, they provide for, 1 Kings 19:5-8. They guide Gen. 24:7-40.

#### Ministry towards unbelievers

Angels Cause destruction on earth at the Command of God Gen. 19:1-3. They also send pestilence at the behest of the Almighty 2 Sam. 24:15-17.

There are seven holy angels whose names represent the work they perform.

1. **Michael** which means who is like God? Michael is one who fights with evil doers and Satan. Dan 10:21, Jude 9, Rev. 12:7-9
2. **Gabriel** which means Man of God. He is one who brings good news. Luke 1:11-22, Lk 1:26-38.
3. **Raphael** which means God has healed. He brings good health to people.
4. **Phenuel** which means face of God Gen. 32:24-31, Judges 8:8, 9, 17.
5. **Uriel** which means God is light.
6. **Lemuel** which means devoted to God.
7. **Kemuel** which means congregation of God.

#### The fallen angels

The angels were created in a state of sanctity but under probation. In the distant past, they were put on their trial. As to the means adopted for this ordeal, we know nothing with certainty; but the church has generally held that their temptation was to pride.

Hooker the Saint says 'It seemeth that there was no other way for angels to sin, but by reflexes of their understanding upon themselves; when being held with admiration of their own sublimity and honour the memory of their subordination unto God and their dependency on Him was drowned in this conceit; where upon their adoration, love and limitation of God could not choose but be also interrupted. The fall of angels therefore was pride'.

Under the trial, a number of the angels fell; they were thrust out of heaven and became fallen angels or devils. These fallen spirits St. Jude describes as 'the angels which kept not their first estate but left their own habitation'. At the head of this rebel host is satan thought to have been one of the Cherubim, or spirit of knowledge, owning the name of Lucifer the light bearer. Of his fall, our blessed Saviour speaks in the words 'I beheld satan as lightning fall from heaven'. The fall of the devils was without remedy, may be they have sinned deliberately with full knowledge of what they were doing and of the consequences of their sin. When the new race appeared on the earth, the fallen angels became their tempters and enemies. It seems probable that the human race was created by God to take, after due trial, the vacant places in heaven once occupied by fallen angels. If this be so the root of their ill will towards mankind is jealousy.

How should the existence and offices of the angels influence our lives.



- (a) It teaches us humility. If God is thus surrounded by the hosts of angels excelling in strength, how great must He be himself.
- (b) Love to God: How marvelous God's love to man in accepting the ministry of angels on his behalf and giving His angels charge over those who shall be heirs of salvation.
- (c) Activity in God's service: The angels are ever ready to do Him service, man equally ought to be prompt.
- (d) Reality of our Warfare: The struggles of individual souls equally with the conflicts of hosts of heaven and of the devil and his angels are objects of interest to the celestial hierarchies.

- (e) Dignity of Worship: 'Knowest thou not thou standest with the angles, thou singest with them, thou praises God with them? (St. Augustine).

St. Hooker on his deathbed was found meditating on the order of the Holy Angels. Wearied and worn out, sad with endless controversy, troubled at heart by long watching over the perverse fancies and wilfulness of unruly men, he found peace and consolation in meditating on the perfect harmony and love of the blessed angles around the throne of God. 'This life is made up of perturbations' said the dying saint 'and oh the rest and refreshment of turning our eyes from it towards the abode of peace'.

## SEA SUNDAY JULY 14

Please remember the seafarers

### MISSION TO SEAMEN CARES FOR SEAFARERS

- It can be a hard life being a seafarer. The hours are long, the work is often boring. If the crew came from different countries, they may not speak the same language.
- Many seafarers are far from their homes and families for months at a time. They long for news, they worry about their children.
- Seafarers often face danger. Sometimes they are badly treated or their wages are not paid.
- Even in port they may get ashore for a few hours, in a strange place, in a foreign country. There is no one to receive them.

If there are trained Chaplains, they take time to meet them receive them and make them feel at home. They stand up for seafarers and help them get a fair deal and to make sure life at sea is as safe as it can. In over 100 ports the Missions to seamen runs seafarers' centres. CSI has one such centre in Tuticorin, (Diocese of Tirunelveli).

Bishop Jason Dharmaraj left no stone unturned in meeting people, explaining the need to establish such centre and tried his best in raising funds - a successful venture.

Pray for all those who journey - the world of travel and travellers.

Pray especially for those who make travel through sea and water possible and for their safety.

Pray for families, children of the farers that they will find comfort and courage as they spend days and works on the sea.

*Council for Mission & Evangelism*



# Living for Others\*

REV. D.S. JEEVAN BABU

At the outset I would like to thank our Bishop for giving me the opportunity to share the word of God with Ordinands and the people gathered here from several congregations. Secondly, I would like to congratulate the Bishop, other officers and the ministerial committee for taking an historic decision to ordain women for the first time in the diocese. Thirdly, I would like to bring greetings to you all on behalf of the General Secretary of the National council of churches in India.

It is a matter of great joy and a home coming for me. Twenty years ago at the first ordination service of the Vellore Diocese I was ordained.

Let me bring this message with my own story. I stand here with twenty years of experience in Pastoral ministry of various churches. At the very beginning of my ministry and at the very first pastorate committee there was a big discussion between me and the committee members regarding my stay in the villages. I was asked to go to a village and stay there where there are no facilities of good residence. I vehemently refused to go to villages since I was a graduate of a prestigious college ie., United theological college Bangalore. But the Pastorate committee insisted that I should stay in the villages. I could not accept the challenge since I was proud. This pride made me to spend the whole night in tears. Next day I went to a village church and I was so happy that I had gone to that village church. I was taken aback by the love and concern of villagers. While I was returning the cross of Christ came into my mind and comforting me saying that my sufferings are nothing before Jesus sufferings. This situation and analysis of that situation helped me to understand the meaning of suffering in the ministry and also the meaning of humility in the ministry. This incident was a turning point in the life and ministry.

Therefore, at the beginning of this service itself I would like impress upon the ordinands that the ordination does not give us any 'power' as such but it makes us more responsible. Ordination should make us more humble than proud and boastful. Ordained ministry should talk more about their responsibilities than their rights. Bishop Rider Devapriyam while addressing the ordinands at the ordinations service of the Karnataka Central diocese a few years ago told them that they are not the shepherds Jesus

is the shepherd and the ordinands should allow the Good Shepherd to work in and through them. This aspect of the ministry should be taken seriously by the ordained ministers.

One of the main causes for many problems in the church today is the concept of 'Prestige' This word need to be removed from our dictionaries. Even within the family this word prestige plays big havoc. As Christians we should not become slaves of 'pride' and 'prestige'. We need to be more humble on the model of Jesus Christ. Only the humility and humble mindedness will make anywhere near the successful pastors. I even suggest that the ordained and the Bishops should be seated along with the congregation and allow the laity to do the most of the work even in the worship service this would surely help us to understand what it means to be a humble minister of God.

II. Pastoral ministry is not an easy job today. It is a very difficult job at the same time it is a more blessed job too. Pastors are like 'maddele' or *Mrudhangam* beaten at both sides. Pastor has more bosses than anybody else. They are responsible to hierarchy, church people, pastorate committee members, some influential members of the church and events the church sexton. Somehow to survive, many pastors do their work to please one among the above. Some times they think that if they satisfy either Bishop. Treasurer or sexton they are doing their ministry. This is not true. I personally would like to request the ordinands who are seated here and the ministers not to work to please either Bishops, treasurer or sexton or anybody. Please work to appease God only.

In the Orthodox church there is a very meaningful practice of bishops and clergy seeking the forgiveness of the congregations. I think CSI should follow this with immediate effect. Bishops, ordained ministers and the lay leaders at least once in a year should seek the forgiveness of the congregations for the mistakes that we do in the various ministries. This practice, I am sure, will enable the Bishops and the ordained to do their ministries more meaningfully than ever.

\*Message given at the Ordination Service at the Central Church, Vellore.



III. I would like to congratulate women who came forward for the ordained ministry. Hats off to all women who contribute their life and time for various ministries in the church today. And it is sad that still they are not properly recognised though they are doing yeoman service. Today here women ordinands outnumber men ordinands. This is a good sign. I am sure number of women minister will increase substantially in the years to come.

Eversince I wrote my B.D. thesis on the theme 'ordination of women in the church of South India' I have been speaking of new type of pastors from women ministers. Once again I request women ordinands who are seated here to give us a new image of pastors. Many women pastors are simply following the traditional men pastors image. As women you are different from us. You are an embodiment of Love, forgiveness, sacrifice and patience. Therefore, you can give us a new image of pastors, even for male pastors to follow.

Women are our mothers and when they serve meals we enjoy and cherish, why not they serve the Lord's supper? Women are the uniting force at home, why not they play a key role in our ministries. It was mother Mary who delivered Jesus Christ to us. It was again a women who received the resurrection news first and informed others, when such is the case why not women play a key role in our church ministries. St. Paul beautifully said in one of his letters that 'don't lord over, but be examples'. Let women develop new models of pastoral ministry based upon 'humility' rather than 'pride'.

IV. What is the message for the church today? I wrote a poem on christmas, One of the lines goes like this 'Christlessness is the malady of christmas'. But somebody printed in another magazine as 'Christlessness is the MELODY of the christmas'. One of the saddest story of the church, church related institutions, Christians and our families is the CHRISTLESSNESS. Christ is absent everywhere. And people seem to be happy over such situation. May be for this reason we seem to observe even GOOD FRIDAY as a sad Friday with KANJI. What did Jesus do on the cross? He brought victory on the cross. He showed the way of salvation through cross. Therefore the whole world call that Friday as Good Friday. Jesus showed us the way of life through the way of cross. Only when follow the way of cross we have the share in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Today the church is called to die with Christ so that the church can experience the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Where is the church today? The church is living contrary to the expectations of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Church is being rocked by all sorts of controversies and

court cases. The church is suffering from power mongering, money, politics and court cases. We proudly say and proclaim that our God is the real God but we demonstrate our faith in God in courts only. Now our God is in the courts and in stay orders. It is a shame on the part of the church to go to courts for justice. Hans Kung one of the great theologians of the century has said that church is a family of families' If we are a family of God can we afford to go to courts for settlement of our family problems. One of the lawyers has responded for a question of enquiry about his future 'as long as CSI is there I have no problem' It's really sad that Christians are more often seen going to courts than to church worship services. It's hightime that we depend more on God than on Courts.

One of the Orthodox church bishops often says that the Orthodox church is not a church since it did not produce any martyrs. We need to realise this very important fact of christianity. We are happy and proudly seated here because hundreds of disciples of Jesus Christ gave their blood for us. The blood is the foundation of the church. Bartholomew one of the disciples was tied upside down and was cut into pieces since he stood for Jesus Christ. Our contemporaries like Oscar Romerio of El Salvador was shot dead while he was preaching from the pulpit. He said the grain of wheat should die in order bear fruit. If it does not die it does not produce anything and it will remain alone. Christian life should be like a grain of wheat, A 11 year old Pakistan Christian boy was brutally killed on the road since he came out vehemently against the child labour. It was great testimony for our Lord Jesus Christ. Now the whole Christian community is on the roads fighting against the child labour. A pastor's death in Romania brought sea of changes throughout Eastern Europe. Where is the church today? Instead of living and dying for others, is bringing disgrace to Jesus Christ by becoming slaves of money, corruption, status quo and by taking the church to courts.

Jesus Christ clearly said if anybody wants to live and enjoy the life he should deny himself and take up his cross, which means '*living for others*'

I would like to impress upon the ordinands, clergy and other members of the congregation to practice '*living for others*' It is only in living for others we can experience the abundant life that Jesus offered to us. Today many people including Christians believe and live in promoting themselves. They even live at the expense of others. If we want to be true to Jesus Christ and wish to promote Jesus Christ, we need to live for others. This is the only way by which we can participate in the mission of God.



# Paulo Freire's Pedagogy and Communication\*

REV. HANNIBAL CABRAL

God is a God of communication. God intends everyone to be in relation with Him, with his/her neighbours and also in healthy relationship with the creation. The core of the gospel is that God loves us in this relationship and also anticipates us to live in harmony, sharing and in caring relationship. Hence, basically we are created in the image of God to communicate. The goal or objective of communication is to live a life of faith in God in relation to our responsibility to our neighbours and other creation of God. Communication helps us to grow in our whole personality and be a responsible member in society. It is always in relationship with the community in which we live, we find meaning to our lives. Communication helps us to interact with others. To quote Frank E.X. Dance's definition is as relevant as any when he says, 'Communication is a process by which senders and receivers of messages interact in given social contexts.'<sup>1</sup> This communication is more than mere transmission of information, rather it is a stimulus to action and the ultimate purpose is to bring changes in others, in our cognitive, physical and social environment.

As it is shared by F. Hrangkhuma, 'whether or not deliberated or intentional, communication takes place whenever humans interact with one another. Verbal communication is only one of the symbols and processes of communication. It takes place even without word.'<sup>2</sup> The effectiveness of the communication is always depends on some of the ingredients. In this paper I would like to mention a few and try to reflect them from the perspective of Paulo Freire's Pedagogical concept which is more of liberative in nature.

## Paulo Freire's Pedagogy

Paulo Freire, the famous Brazilian educator, who by his innovative theories and methodology of education, has given the challenge for a truly revolutionary pedagogy, which has been called as 'education for liberation'. The

philosophy and methodology of Paulo Freire have made propound impact on educational thinking, especially in the field of adult education. As it is observed, 'Paulo Freire's educational theory and practice were developed in a society characterized by rigid hierarchical social structure, neo-colonial exploitation, precarious and selective educational system where schools are instruments of maintaining status quo, high percentage of illiteracy, prevalence of poverty etc. They are obviously characteristics very similar to the Indian situation.'<sup>3</sup> Paulo Freire himself admits the similarity between Brazil and India in its hierarchical social structure, neo-colonial exploitation and prevalence of great poverty. To quote:

In the main, in the fundamental aspect, Brazil and India are on par. We are both dependent bourgeois societies. The ruling classes in both the countries are serving their own interest as well as the interests of the foreign ruling classes.<sup>4</sup>

Paulo Freire asserts that there is no neutral education. Education either domesticates or liberates. He looks at the present education as the one which is passive and domesticating. Brian Wren elaborates this aspect as follows:

When students sit and listen to the teacher, take notes, remember 'facts', and reproduce teacher's knowledge in tests, the 'message' being silently conveyed is that passive acceptance is more desirable than active learning, that recall is the highest intellectual achievement, and that the voice of authority is more to be prized than independent judgement. All these are attitudes that bolster the status-quo and are therefore highly political under the guise of neutrality. A truly 'subversive' education sets out to overturn them in the interests of the students personal development as a human being and ultimately of our planets survival.<sup>5</sup>

\*Paper presented at the seminar on Communication for Liberation conducted by the Communications Department held April at the SCM House, Bangalore.

<sup>1</sup> C.R.W. David, *Communication in Theological Education: A Curriculum*, (Bangalore: BTESSC, 1988), p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> F. Hrangkhuma, 'Mission as Communication', in Joseph Mattam and Sebastian Kim (edited) *Dimensions of Mission In India* (Bombay: St. Pauls Publications, 1995), p. 184.

<sup>3</sup> Ninan Koshy, 'A Note On Paulo Freire' in *Education for Liberation*, Bangalore : Ecumenical Christian Centre Publication, 1975, p.7.

<sup>4</sup> Paulo Freire, *Education for Liberation*, (Bangalore : Whitfield, 1975), p.7.

<sup>5</sup> Brian Wren, 'Introducing Paulo Freire,' in *Learning for Living*, Jan. 1974, vol. 13, No. 3; p. 98.



Paulo Freire suggests this 'subversive education' as 'conscientization' which is an act of 'knowing, a critical approach to reality'. According to Freire this conscientization takes place in a dialogical process between educatee and the educator. It leads both of them to an act of commitment and transformation.

The word suggests (conscientization) a happening, a moving process of the mind, an awakening of awareness in which a human being recognizes himself/herself a person, an active subject rather than a passive object, whose very language shapes the word, whose simplistic act changes the face of nature. Whose critical action then reflection leading to new action (praxis) can improve his/her own situation and, in solidarity with others, change the society for the better and make life more truly human.<sup>6</sup>

The strength of Freire's pedagogy lies in its implicit value for critical reflection of the learner's oppressed situations and action for liberation from those inhuman oppressed conditions. It is action and reflection on reality in order to transform it. As it is reflected by K.C. Abraham:

Freire has rejected the pre-suppositions of western education....Authentic learning occurs where there is a union of action and reflection, which takes us to the very heart of situation in order to change it.<sup>7</sup>

#### 1. Authentic christian communication should address the Issue of *Social Injustice*:

Almost all problems in the world from poverty and basic human rights to environmental degradation and ecological crisis are manifestations of unjust social-political system in the global, regional and national levels. One of the major problems in India is the abject poverty which is due to the unjust social structure. The gap between the 'haves' and 'have nots' has brought about the dehumanized condition. Unless one is exposed to critically approaching the reality the transformation of the society is impossible.

The church's social concern as a ministry of care and service is to feed the hungry, to help the needy, to heal the sick, and be an instrument of critique and correction in order to bring justice, peace, love and integrity in the creation. Albeit, the teaching ministry of the church has to address these social concerns, more often it has failed to do so. One of the distinct reasons for this kind of attitude in christians is that of compartmentalizing spiritual

and secular, reason/emotion, self/other, male/female etc; Most of the teaching of the contemporary church considers social problems as secular. Any effort to address these issues will be looked as worldly. The content of sermons, the Sunday school curriculum, and the prevailing theology in most of the congregations have been modelled christian gospel as a spiritual exercise for an entry into heaven. This indicates that the issue of social justice and the role of the pedagogy is not only social problem, it is a theological problem also. Therefore, christian religious education in India should look for a model of pedagogy which will complement a theology that holds together the dichotomized elements of christian faith-life in India in a dialogical manner. This would mean that the pedagogical task of the church in India is complementing its theological task.

At present there is a growing awareness among the contextual theologians of the third world, who have taken the contemporary social issues seriously. Justice is the primary metaphor used by liberation theologians. Hence as communicators we need to take this issue seriously.

#### 2. Method of Conscientization for Awareness Building

One of the method envisaged by Paulo Freire which will be of great importance is that of 'Conscientization'. According to him:

Conscientization is a process in which men, not as recipients but as knowing subjects, achieves a deepening awareness both of the socio-cultural reality which shapes their lives and of their capacity to transform that reality.<sup>8</sup>

Conscientization is an effort through which we help the masses of people to help transform the society. In simple terms it may be defined as the critical awareness of reality and of the capacity to transform it. (story of crutches) To quote: 'The oppressed become aware of the reality which is exploitation and of their ability to change the situation. Therefore, conscientisation leads to action. According to Paulo Freire unless one realizes that he or she is in oppressive condition because of the oppressive structure it is difficult for liberation. (e. g. Caste system, the system of bonded labour, Deva Dhaasi system) Awareness building or conscientization in the Indian context will, therefore mean first the awareness-building of the poor, illiterate, ignorant, and downtrodden, women, labourers and workers who belong to the lowest caste and lower strata of the society.

<sup>6</sup> Brian Wren, p. 98

<sup>7</sup> K.C. Abraham, 'In search of a Theology of Development-SODEPAX, in *Religion and Society*, vol. XIX, No. 3, 1972, p. 94.

<sup>8</sup> Paulo Freire, *Education for Liberation* (Bangalore : ECC, 1975), p. 22.



### 3. Communication is not to be Hierarchical or dominant

In the 'Banking Concept of Education' the teacher is said to have a deposit of knowledge which he/she must impart to the ignorant student. Here the student or learners become passive listeners, without anything to contribute. It fails to acute the potentialities of the student and leads to manipulation. The competence of the teacher easily gives rise to authoritarianism. The Banking concept of education does not open any dialogue with the student. It is a violent model, characterized by its being competitive, unilateral and alienating from ones culture.<sup>9</sup> Often this kind of attitude is seen in our missionary enterprise. Particularly as we live in a religious plural society, we often tend to think and communicate with our neighbours as the ones who have the absolute truth. We are not willing to listen to others and the truth also found in other religions. The other area in which this kind of attitude is found is our inability to come out with the predominating traditions, customs, cultures songs and the order of worship which we have blindly adopted and adapted from the West. Added to this are the 'Superior and triumphalistic attitudes of many of the western missionaries, who mistakenly identified the universal gospel with their own cultural values. With such an attitude the effect of the gospel on a nation is interpreted to be to soften their manner, purify their social intercourse, and speedily lead them into the habits of civilized life.'<sup>10</sup>

Freire argues for a problem posing education which promotes critical reflection directed to the transformation of structures of oppression. Freire, proposes the method of dialogue. For Paulo Freire dialogue is a matter of participation. To quote George Matthew:

Paulo's main theme is that the act of learning is a dialogical process between educate and educator in the act of creation and critical consciousness of the world around them. Education, or 'cultural action', as Paulo prefers to call it, is an act of commitment and transformation, a call to participate in history.<sup>11</sup>

For S.J. Samartha dialogue is more than discussion. To quote: Dialogue is not a matter of discussion but of relationship. Dialogue is a spirit, a mood, an attitude towards neighbours of other faiths.<sup>12</sup>

As communicators we need to discern the manipulative, alienating mechanisms that are existing in our church as well as in our mission model which leads for injustice and de-humanization. For Communication to be effective, the communicator and the receptor should participate in the same cultural context and in a mutual shared atmosphere. According to Smith, 'The key to understand each case is involvement, sharing something in common. Having that 'Commonness' is the basis of communication. Involvement is inseparable from communication as the root of the word itself shows.'<sup>13</sup>

Communication is the central task of our mission and life. We need to correct many of the glaring mistakes of the past. Effective communication enhances the more healthy change that take seriously the initiative for change from within. Freire's pedagogy is directed towards humanisation. It is liberating and creative. In Christian term it is redemptive.

<sup>9</sup> Arokiasamy, 'Theology of Education and Human Liberation', in *Indian Theological Studies*, (21, 2, June, 1984.) p. 129

<sup>10</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991), p. 293

<sup>11</sup> George Matthew edited, *A Day with Paulo Freire* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1980)

<sup>12</sup> Samartha, 'Christian Concern for Dialogue in India' in *Current Dialogue*, December, 1985, p.3

<sup>13</sup> Donald Smith, *Creating Understanding* (Zondervan: Grand rapids), p.24



# Inside the Indian Church

REVIEW BY Dr. M. ABEL

INSIDE THE INDIAN CHURCH: By *Mathai Zachariah*; Published by ISPCK, Rs. 30.00

A lot of criticism is now-a-days levelled against the churches of all denominations in India not only by such hostile, anti-Christian groups but also by a number of church members including some committed Christian leaders closely associated with the churches and church related organisations and institutions. In fact, some well-meaning and responsible members of the various churches have even launched movements in a bid to bring about some important and badly needed reforms in the churches. The People's Movement for the Reformation of the Church of South India is one of them. All these are indications of the existing dissatisfaction with the health of the church in India today.

It is in this prevailing context of doubts and discontent about the condition of the Church in India that one has to welcome and appreciate Dr. Mathai Zachariah's book 'Inside the Indian Church'. The reflections contained in this book are based on the 'experiences and thoughts' which the author has gained during his long association with the churches in India and active involvement in their life and work at various levels in SCM, NCCI and so on. Therefore the insights and comments set forth in this volume acquire a high degree of credibility and authenticity. As Dr. Mathai Zachariah himself has stated in his Introduction, 'What I am describing in the following chapters are the impressions that were registered in the cave of my heart. I do it not as a critic from outside, but as a participant and as a church member, from inside the circle of faith, and as one who has shared the glory and the pathos of being a Christian in India today'. This is clearly reflected in the agony and concern he expresses about the various undesirable and reprehensible practices and forces that have crept into the life and work of the churches as well as the hope he entertains about the regenerative inner resources of the church's faith and spirituality. While he is quite open and unsparing in exposing the ill-health of the church, he has also laid down certain prescriptions for restoring the health of the church. Thus his critique of the church is like the surgeon's knife smeared with the ointment that heals the wound.

The book, besides the Foreword by Dr. M.M. Thomas and the author's introduction, consists of fourteen pieces dealing with a wide variety of subjects ranging from the nature and mission of the church in the contemporary context of the struggles of the poor and marginalised to the patterns of leadership in the Indian Churches. The main concern of Dr. Zachariah in all these chapters is to call the churches in India to develop a new and indigenous theological awareness relevant to the existing context of marginalisation, pluralism, dalit movement, denominationalism etc. and be equipped and empowered by the Holy Spirit to become a creative minority and to participate in Christ's ongoing mission of salvation and humanisation. This is emphatically stated in his piece on 'The Open Church'. He says: 'What is asked of us is openness in our witness and service, making the church a Church for Others, and being a path finder for the whole community.....This change in the basic attitude of the church is a must if we are to exist as a creative minority.' The chapters dealing with denominationalism and ecumenism highlight the obstacles in the way of church union and evaluate the work of Indian ecumenical organisations like the NCCI, YMCA, YWCA, SCM, WSCF, WCC, etc. Zachariah has done well to focus the reader's attention on such current issues as the role of women in the church, pastoral recruitment, indigenisation of theological education and renewal of the local parishes in order to help them to 'respond to the imperative of mission, evangelism and service in their respective local situations'.

The chapter on 'The Leaders of the Church in India' should be of particular interest to the reader. Dr. Mathai Zachariah has boldly exposed the authoritarian tendencies that are responsible for the erosion of the spiritual foundations of the churches. In this connection, he wants the whole church in India to reconsider the role of the bishop as administrator. His comments on the 'Five Star Church Leader' and the ruthless use of power and money to control people and committees and churches' will find an echo in many quarters concerned with the health of the church. He says: 'There are many church-related people in India, who have wrongly amassed money, properties etc. What a far cry from the Christian idea of a leader: 'he who is the greatest among you should be the servant



of all'. His warning as well as his call in this regard should be heeded by all, especially by the bishops and other ecclesiastical dignitaries. He states: 'the ancient tradition of our land glorifies sacrificial living and only those who renounced material wealth were regarded as 'gurus'. We expect our leaders and bishop, gurus of the Church, to live in the light of this tradition, representing Christ's eucharistic (suffering) presence in India'.

The book also sheds valuable light on Christian educational and medical institutions and other service organisations. The para-church organisations like the action groups also come under the scrutiny of the author. After pointing up the 'elitism and tokenism' that have come to mark the church-related institutions and organisations, Dr. Zachariah says that 'when the traditional channels of the Church's compassion through time honoured methods of service are losing ground, the action groups should be seen as a new technique. Not that such action will usher in a social revolution but it helps the church to be a visible sign of people's liberation, to be a creative minority championing lost causes'.

The reader may feel that the volume does not contain any over-arching central theme systematically analysed in depth because of the inclusion of a great diversity of topics and thoughts based on the personal reminiscences of the author. It is in the nature of a collection of the random thoughts of the author. This, however, does not in any way minimise the value of the fresh insights and ideas brought out by the author. He has succeeded in his 'effort to understand the church in India, amidst a very

unique pluralistic situation, seeking for a theological dynamic that would enable it to consciously choose lines of action that are meaningful in our socio-cultural and spiritual context'. He has manifested a rare courage and conviction in exposing the irrelevance of the contemporary understanding and strategies of the mission and evangelism of the churches in the context of the struggles of the marginalised sections of our society and the search for truth in a pluralistic society. The same courage of conviction marks his comments on the creeping authoritarianism and the five-star lifestyle of the church leaders, the elitist character of the church-related institutions, denial of proper and adequate space for women, youth and the local parish etc.

The value of the book would have been enhanced if the author, who has had such a great advantage of the inside knowledge of the churches in India, had put forward a bold action plan to implement the measures he has suggested for the spiritual renewal of the church and reorganisation of its structure of leadership, power and authority. There is a crying need for the reformation of the churches in these areas. However, it must be said to the credit of the book and the author that many revolutionary thoughts are floated which are bound to stimulate further thinking and discussions by the ordinary members of the churches and also to challenge the leaders of the church to initiate action to make the Indian Church an effective instrument of Christ's mission in India today. Bishops and Church leaders as well as common laymen will find the book highly enlightening and a reading of it rewarding as well.



# NEWS FROM ALL OVER

## Duma committee rejects plea for Russian ban on missionaries

A call by the Russian Orthodox Church to ban the missionary work of foreigners in Russia has been rejected by the Committee on Religious and Public Organisations of the State Duma (the lower chamber of the Russian Parliament).

On 16 May, the committee gave its approval to the draft law 'On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations'. A Duma-staff member, Vyacheslav Polosin, one of the key figures in drafting the new law, expects the draft to have its first reading in the Duma before the presidential elections, scheduled for June 16.

The committee rejected a proposal by the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church to ban the missionary work of foreigners in Russia unless they have an invitation from Russia and work within the framework of a Russian religious organisation. Instead, the committee agreed to a compromise requiring foreign religious organisations to register with the government.

The arrival of new missionaries has been a sensitive issue for the Russian Orthodox Church - by far the country's biggest and most influential church, with a long-standing traditional role in Russian society and culture, a role it has been successfully rebuilding since the end of communism. In 1993, a proposed law which included a provision banning foreign missionaries prompted international protests. The law was vetoed by Russian President Boris Yeltsin.

If the new draft law, as proposed by the Duma's committee, is passed, foreign religious organisations will be required to submit to the Russian government their 'charter or another basic document', certified by the respective government body of their country of origin, as well as a description of their religious teaching and practice, and a statement of intent.

The current law, adopted in 1990 and viewed by many as excessively liberal, does not require registration, and gives preachers of all organisations and cults, both foreign and domestic, freedom to operate in Russia.

The new draft is considered by many politicians to be a reasonable compromise which allows regulation of missionary work without violating the freedom of conscience enshrined in Russia's constitution.

But the leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church still insists on the need for protection against 'non-traditional' religions in Russia. During an official visit last week to the Komi Republic and Permskaya Oblast in European Russia, Patriarch Alexei II of Moscow, head of the Russian Orthodox Church, urged local governments to adopt stricter local laws against foreign missionaries.

Polosin told *ENI* that 18 out of 89 constituent regions of the Russian Federation had already adopted such laws, which, he said, were absolutely unconstitutional. The mayor of St. Petersburg has vetoed similar legislation in his city, while in several other cases the wording of legislation was softened after protests from the Prosecutor's Office, the Russian equivalent of an attorney-general.

In the early 1990s the end of communism and of restrictions on religious activity tempted tens of thousands of missionaries from around the world to come 'to convert atheist Russia'. Initially, Russian society at large welcomed the new arrivals. Government institutions, the media and the public had for the most part little experience of dealing with religion, and often could not tell the difference between the Orthodox Church, the newly arrived Protestant denominations and various sects.

As Russians, euphoric over the end of communist repression, welcomed everything that had previously been banned, foreign evangelists, many of them with generous financial backing from overseas, gained free access to stadia, concert halls, television stations and to the inexperienced hearts and minds of the Russian people. As the missionaries distributed humanitarian aid among Russians suffering under the difficult economic reforms of the early 1990s, they found it relatively easy to recruit members for their religious organisations.

At the same time, the Russian Orthodox Church, weakened by 70 years of persecution and restrictions that had left only a few churches functioning, had lost many of its skills in missionary and social work. The Orthodox Church felt threatened by the new 'competition', and strongly resented the foreign influences.

'We have always been convinced that Russian multi-national culture has its roots in the Orthodox culture, and we believe that the restoration of religion and culture



has to be in the national, though not a chauvinist, spirit,' Yelena Speranskaya, a senior researcher with the Moscow Patriarchate's Department of External Church Relations, told *ENI*.

However, many commentators believe that foreign missionary activity reached its peak in 1992-93, and that since then Russian society has become more sophisticated and level-headed in its attitude to religions from outside the country. At the same time, Western evangelists have begun to lose ground because their practice of preaching from a perspective of cultural superiority has largely failed.

Though big foreign organisations, such as American Campus Crusade for Christ and Co-Mission, maintain large-scale operation in Russia, the overseas funding for many foreign missionaries in Russia has fallen from its previous high levels.

'We often hear pronouncements of great concern, but they now sound exaggerated, because the first infatuation with the unknown is gone, and the missionaries have exhausted their money,' Speranskaya told *ENI*.

The Russian Orthodox Church has also realised it need to develop new initiatives or redevelop lost skills. In 1994, the church's Council of Bishops made mission its main theme. The church's synod has established a special department for missionary work. Two saints recently canonised by the church had been prominent Orthodox missionaries in North America.

The main event of Patriarch Alexei's visit to the Komi Republic and Permskaya Oblast last week was the celebration of the 600th anniversary of St. Stefan of Perm, a Russian Orthodox bishop who evangelised the Ugro-Finish tribes in the area - the ancestors of the Komi people. In the city of Syktyvkar, the patriarch laid the cornerstone for the construction of a new Orthodox cathedral.

Speranskaya told *ENI* that the Finnish Lutheran Church was also actively proselytising among the Komi people who are ethnically close to Finns. The Lutherans had not first consulted with the Orthodox Church, she said.

'We have known the Finnish Lutheran Church for a long time and worked with them in the World Council of Churches,' she said, 'and we had the right to expect that when they started missions here, they would at least out of politeness meet with the historical church here.'

Speranskaya also mentioned the United Methodist Church from the United States as another church and member of the WCC - with several big centres in Russia and a seminary in Moscow. In January this year, it was registered as the Russian Methodist Church.

The presence of foreign missionaries is often used in the Russia Orthodox Church as an argument against ecumenism. Some Western Christians - such as German Lutherans, American Episcopalians and other Anglican churches around the world - have been helping the Russian Orthodox Church to restore churches and monasteries and providing technical and humanitarian aid. However, other Protestant churches have, some Orthodox state, been 'stealing the flock' from the Orthodox Church in Russia. However, there are also in the Orthodox Church strong supporters of ecumenism, including many of the church's top officials.

BY ANDREI ZOLOTOV

## China's booming church faces climate of tolerance and 'hindrance'

China's Christian community is growing at 'breathtaking speed', but churches face a number of 'hindrances' and 'abuses', according to an international church delegation which has just completed an investigative visit to several provinces of the world's most populous country.

The 13-member team, which visited churches and met Chinese academics and government officials overseeing religious bodies, found what one of the team described as 'surprising' tolerance of religion by some state officials. However, the team also found that there were tensions among the Christian community itself, that there were 'some general restrictions' on religious practice, and that, in at least one province, state officials 'blatantly' interfered in church activities.

The team visit to China, organised by the World Council of Churches, examined the implementation by Beijing of its 1994 decrees on religion. The WCC team visit follows meetings in Beijing two years ago between the WCC's general secretary, Konrad Raiser, and officials of the Chinese government's Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB). At that time, RAB officials invited the WCC to send a team to China.

Religion remains a sensitive issue in China, even 20 years after the end of the Cultural Revolution, during which religion was banned. The government allows Protestants to practise their faith, provided they do so as members of churches registered with an operating under the authority of local RAB officials. A similar situation applies for Catholics.

China's main Protestant body is the China Christian Council, which operates both as a council and as a 'post-denominational' church. (The CCC is a member church of the World Council of Churches.) The government



frowns upon foreign church denominations and missionaries, and this attitude has prompted criticism, from evangelical groups and others who refuse to recognise the government's authority to regulate religious practices.

The WCC team reported that, according to official estimates, China has 10 million baptised Christians, 'and their number is growing daily'. Dwain Epps, the WCC's International Affairs coordinator and a member of the team which visited China, told *ENI* that some Christian communities in China were growing by between 20 and 30 per cent a year.

However, the team said in a 'briefing' paper released 23 May that 'there remains a dearth of qualified pastoral leadership [and] certain tensions exist between church leaders ordained before the Cultural Revolution, who are now in their 70s older, and a new generation of clergy in their 20s and 30s'.

Members of the team visited churches in three provinces in China, and Beijing, Nanjing and Shanghai, where they met senior CCC and RAB officials.

In Zhejiang province, the team said, 'relations between the church and state officials appeared friendly and constructive'. But team members visiting the province of Henan, a mainly rural region south-west of Beijing, reported that the RAB seemed 'to have stage-managed' the visit. The RAB presence was obtrusive and intrusive throughout; free conversations with church leaders and believers were virtually impossible. Despite this, the delegation was able to piece together a pattern of state abuse with respect to the implementation of the decrees on religion....Local regulations on religion are unclear, and national laws imposed arbitrarily.'

Team members visiting the province of Shenyang, which has a large Korean ethnic community, reported that of 1700 religious venues, 1500 had applied for registration and been processed. 'No application was denied.'

Asked by *ENI* whether the state regulations on religion meant that conversations between the WCC delegation and Chinese Christians were restrained or self-censored, Epps said that members of the China Christian Council had encouraged the team 'to take a hard look at the situation, not just church-state relations, but also at issues within the church'. He said that some of the older Christians the team met were cautious, but generally people were able and willing to talk openly, though in one region this had to be done away from RAB officials.

Asked about reports of repression and imprisonment of Christians in China, Epps said that the delegation had been encouraged by Christians to visit one pastor who had been placed under house detention after the RAB intervened because of an internal dispute within a

CCC-linked church. The delegation had asked permission from the state authorities to visit the pastor. However, although permission was at first granted by the RAB, it was withdrawn.

Epps said the delegation also heard reports of other cases of repression. 'We would not deny that this is going on,' Epps said. 'Given the nature of the situation, there is potential for a sharper policy of political control [of religion] being developed by the state. This would be disadvantageous both for CCC-related people and certainly for others.'

'The other side of the picture is that I was pleased and surprised to hear from CCC officials and the RAB of a quite remarkable degree of tolerance of what would have been called in Eastern Europe dissident religious groups.' Epps was referring to groups which have not registered with the government and are thereby defying the law.

The CCC was providing such groups with Bibles, remaining in regular contact with them, and hoping that these groups would eventually join up with the recognised churches. In two of the provinces visited, Epps said, the RAB tolerated- 'in the interests of harmony'- many Christian groups which had not been registered.

Epps said it was clear that even in the three provinces visited by team members, there were 'thousands of missionaries functioning outside the law', including some 'extraordinarily heterodox movements', some with an obsession on healing, others with apocalyptic views.

China, he said, was experiencing what Russia experienced after the fall of communism and the end of religious repression - 'every kind of religionist movement came out of the woodwork, and people just ate it up'.

The challenge faced by the China Christian Council, Epps said, was to try to bring 'a semblance of orthodoxy, along the lines of the Nicene Creed, into this situation'.

### Women are 'vital factor' in growth of Chinese church

The contribution of women has been a 'vital factor' to the growth of the Chinese church, which has increased ten-fold since 1949, when the communist People's Republic was founded, according to a study on women in the contemporary Chinese church, prepared for the Lutheran World Federation.

According to the report, which is intended as an interim contribution to the LWF's China Study Project, women account for about 70 per cent of Christians in the country. The report quotes figures from the China Christian Council, China's main Protestant body, showing that the number of ordained women has increased from 75 in 1988, to 223 in 1994. By 1994, women accounted for one sixth of the total number of ordained pastors, compared to less than a tenth in 1988.



There are 465 female students and 46 full-time female teachers at 13 theological seminaries in China, representing about half the total number of students and teachers in these institutions.

Chinese Christianity has also taken 'a positive and pro-active stance with regard to the liberation of women', according to the study, which says that the Christianity has promoted the 'theory of gender equality'.

By opposing foot-binding and prostitution, Christianity has 'actively helped liberate women from oppression', and by establishing schools for girls and by training women for professional work, the church has helped raise the educational level of women.

However, women in the Chinese church 'still face many limitations and difficulties'. Although in some districts, women have been 'fully accepted' as pastors and church leaders in a number of villages 'even ordained women pastors are not permitted to perform baptisms or celebrate Holy Communion'. And in some big cities the 'distribution of Holy Communion is the responsibility only of the men, while the women are only able to do some of the preparatory work'.

Women have few opportunities to participate in the formation of church policy and pastoral leadership, and there are 'some congregational leaders who still think that it is not appropriate for women to preach from the pulpit'.

Among the reasons mentioned by congregations which refuse to accept women as church workers are that 'women are likely to become pregnant and give birth to a child, which will adversely influence their work; that they cannot take on hard physical work; and that it is not convenient for them to visit church members in the evenings'.

But, influenced by the women's liberation movement, 'far-sighted church leaders' have brought into the church the results of current biblical scholarship on the equality of women and men, including 'Western feminist theology', to counteract these 'traditional attitudes'.

The first course in feminist theology at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, which was held in 1993, drew the attention of many academics and students to the subject, and a Chinese feminist theologian, Kwok Pui-lan, has started 'an exploration of feminist theology with Chinese characteristics'.

'Before very long, the Chinese church will most likely be able to develop its own contextualised feminist theology to respond to traditional culture and traditions of the church in order to more effectively resolve the problems of women in the church and in society at large,' the study reports -ENI

BY EDMUND DOOGUE

## Europe's biggest mosque opens in Rome

Europe's biggest mosque was opened the lower slopes of Mont' Antenna, on the left bank of the Tiber, just 10 minutes drive from the Vatican.

Pope John Paul II praised the establishment in Rome of the mosque, which occupies a site of 30,000 square meters, donated by the Rome City Council and has a prayer big enough for 2,000 worshippers. But the Pope also used the opportunity to remind the world that some Islamic countries do not share the liberty of religion that is evident in the Eternal City.

Rome, which is also home to Europe's most ancient Jewish community, officially has 38,000 Muslim residents, making them the city's second biggest religious community. Italy has a total of 300,000 Muslim residents and many smaller mosques. Rome's Chief Rabbi, Elio Toaff, said after the opening of the mosque that the right to meet and pray together 'cannot be denied to any religion'.

## Islam's Victory over Communism

Islam, one of the five major religions in China, spread from the Arab world to China in 651, 1340 years ago. To date, there are more than 10 million believers of Islam among 10 Chinese national minorities, according to 'News from China', released here by the Embassy of the people's Republic of China.

On August 25, 651, the first envoy of the Caliph arrived in Changan, today's Xian. He held an audience with Emperor Gaozong and explained the Islamic doctrine.

Starting from the mid-7th century, Arabs and Persians, believers in Islam came to China through ancient land and marine Silk roads to conduct business. Some of them later became permanent residents in some prosperous cities, where they built mosques and cemeteries. The renowned Huaisheng Mosque in Guangzhous and Phoenix Mosque in Hangzhou were first constructed in the Tang dynasty.

In the early 13th century, Genghis Khan the Mongolian leader and founder of the Yuan Dynasty (1206-1368) launched a large-scale eastward expedition. During the period, hundreds of thousands of Central Asian, Persian and Arabic Muslims immigrated to China.

Statistics offered by the Islamic Association of China demonstrate that China now boasts 30,000 imams and 30,000 mullahs. Islam is the dominant religion among 10 Chinese national minorities—namely the Hui, Uygur, Kazak, Kirgiz, Tajik, Uzbek, Tatar, Longxiang, Salary and Bonan.



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